

Week Ending Friday, March 26, 1999

The President's News Conference

March 19, 1999

Kosovo

The President. Ladies and gentlemen, as all of you know, we have been involved in an intensive effort to end the conflict in Kosovo for many weeks now. With our NATO allies and with Russia, we proposed a peace agreement to stop the killing and give the people of Kosovo the self-determination and government they need and to which they are entitled under the constitution of their government.

Yesterday the Kosovar Albanians signed that agreement. Even though they have not obtained all they seek, even as their people remain under attack, they've had the vision to see that a just peace is better than an unwinnable war. Now only President Milosevic stands in the way of peace.

Today the peace talks were adjourned because the Serbian negotiators refused even to discuss key elements of the peace plan. NATO has warned President Milosevic to end his intransigence and repression or face military action.

Our allies are strongly united behind this course. We are prepared, and so are they, to carry it out. Today I reviewed our planning with my senior advisers and met with many Members of Congress. As we prepare to act, we need to remember the lessons we have learned in the Balkans. We should remember the horror of the war in Bosnia, the sounds of sniper fire aimed at children, the faces of young men behind barbed wire, the despairing voices of those who thought nothing could be done. It took precious time to achieve allied unity there, but when we did, our firmness ended all that. Bosnia is now at peace.

We should remember the thousands of people facing cold and hunger in the hills of Kosovo last fall. Firmness ended that as well. We should remember what happened

in the village of Racak back in January—innocent men, women, and children taken from their homes to a gully, forced to kneel in the dirt, sprayed with gunfire—not because of anything they had done, but because of who they were.

Now, roughly 40,000 Serbian troops and police are massing in and around Kosovo. Our firmness is the only thing standing between them and countless more villages like Racak—full of people without protection, even though they have now chosen peace.

Make no mistake, if we and our allies do not have the will to act, there will be more massacres. In dealing with aggressors in the Balkans, hesitation is a license to kill. But action and resolve can stop armies and save lives.

We must also understand our stake in peace in the Balkans and in Kosovo. This is a humanitarian crisis, but it is much more. This is a conflict with no natural boundaries. It threatens our national interests. If it continues, it will push refugees across borders and draw in neighboring countries. It will undermine the credibility of NATO, on which stability in Europe and our own credibility depend. It will likely reignite the historical animosities, including those that can embrace Albania, Macedonia, Greece, even Turkey. These divisions still have the potential to make the next century a truly violent one for that part of the world that straddles Europe, Asia, and the Middle East.

Unquestionably, there are risks in military action, if that becomes necessary. U.S. and other NATO pilots will be in harm's way. The Serbs have a strong air defense system. But we must weigh those risks against the risks of inaction. If we don't act, the war will spread. If it spreads, we will not be able to contain it without far greater risk and cost. I believe the real challenge of our foreign policy today is to deal with problems before they do permanent harm to our vital interests. That is what we must do in Kosovo.

Let me just make one other statement about this. One of the things that I wanted to do when I became President is to take advantage of this moment in history to build an alliance with Europe for the 21st century, with a Europe undivided, strong, secure, prosperous, and at peace. That's why I have supported the unification of Europe financially, politically, economically. That is why I've supported the expansion of NATO and a redefinition of its missions.

What are the challenges to our realizing that dream? The challenge of a successful partnership with Russia that succeeds in its own mission; the challenge of a resolution of the difficulties between Greece and Turkey so that Turkey becomes an ally of Europe and the West for the long term; and the challenge of instability in the Balkans. In different ways, all those things are at stake here.

I honestly believe that by acting now we can help to give our children and our grandchildren a Europe that is more united, more democratic, more peaceful, more prosperous, and a better partner for the United States for a long time to come.

I will say again to Mr. Milosevic, as I did in Bosnia, I do not want to put a single American pilot into the air; I do not want anyone else to die in the Balkans; I do not want a conflict. I would give anything to be here talking about something else today. But a part of my responsibility is to try to leave to my successors and to our country in the 21st century, an environment in Europe that is stable, humane, and secure. It will be a big part of America's future.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Hunt [Terence Hunt, Associated Press].

Q. Mr. President, as you mentioned, Yugoslav forces seem to be mobilizing for war in Kosovo despite the warnings of NATO airstrikes. After so many threats in the past, why should President Milosevic take this one seriously? And is there is deadline for him to comply? And is it your intention to keep pounding Serb targets until he agrees to your peace terms?

The President. Well, there are several questions there, but let me say, I think he should take this seriously, because we meant—we were serious in Bosnia. And it

was the combined impact of NATO's action in Bosnia, plus the reversals they sustained on the ground in fighting, plus the economic embargo, that led them to conclude that peace was the better course.

Now, he says here that this is not like what happened last fall, that this threatens Serbia's sovereignty to have a multinational force on the ground in Kosovo. But he has put that at risk by his decade—and I want to reemphasize that—his decade of denial of the autonomy to which the Kosovars are legally entitled as a part of Serbia.

My intention would be to do whatever is possible, first of all, to weaken his ability to massacre them, to have another Bosnia; and secondly, to do all that I can to induce him to take—it is not my peace agreement. It was an agreement worked out and negotiated and argued over, with all the parties' concerns being taken into account.

I will say again—for the longest time, we did not believe that either side would take this agreement. And the fact that the Kosovar Albanians did it, I think, reflects foresight and wisdom on their part. They did not get everything they wanted. And in a peace agreement, nobody ever gets everything they want. We've seen it in the Middle East, in Northern Ireland, everywhere else.

So it is not my agreement. It is the best agreement that all the parties can get to give us a chance to go forward without bloodshed. I believe, also, as I have said publicly to Mr. Milosevic and to the Serbs, it is their best chance to keep Kosovo as a part of Serbia and as a part of Yugoslavia. And so I would hope that the agreement could be accepted, and I'll do what I can to see that it is.

Q. And the deadline, sir—is there one?

The President. I don't want to discuss that. We're working on that. I expect to be working on this all weekend.

Helen [Helen Thomas, United Press International].

Chinese Nuclear Espionage

Q. Mr. President, how long have you known that the Chinese were stealing our nuclear secrets? Is there any trust left between the two nations? And some Republicans are saying that you deliberately suppressed the

information from the American people because of the election and your trade goals.

The President. Well, let me try to respond to all those things. First of all, the latter charge is simply untrue. We were notified—Mr. Berger was notified sometime in 1996 of the possibility that security had been breached at the labs, the Energy Department labs where a lot of our nuclear work is done, in the mideighties—not in the 1990's, but in the mideighties—and that there was an investigation being undertaken by the FBI.

Then, sometime in the middle of 1997, he was notified and I was notified that the extent of the security breach might have been quite extensive. So we had the CIA looking into that, the Energy Department looking into that, and the FBI investigation continued with the cooperation, the full cooperation of the Energy Department.

In early 1998 I propounded a Presidential directive designed to improve security at the labs. And as you know, Secretary Richardson's been talking quite a bit in recent days about what has been done since that directive was signed and what continues to be done today.

Now, I think there are two questions here that are related but ought to be kept separate. One is, was there a breach of security in the mideighties; if so, did it result in espionage? That has not been fully resolved, at least as of my latest briefing. The second is—there are really three questions, excuse me—the second is, once the executive branch was notified and the investigations began, was everything done in a timely fashion? I am confident that we in the White House have done what we could to be aggressive about this.

Look, if there was espionage against the United States, I will be very upset about it, as I have been every time there has been. And anybody who committed it ought to be punished, just as we went after Mr. Ames, anybody else who committed espionage against the United States.

In an effort to ensure that there was an independent review of this, in addition to whatever work is being done by the Senate and House committees—who have, as you know, received more than a dozen briefings over the course of this investigation, going back to 1996—I asked Senator Rudman,

former Republican Senator from New Hampshire, and the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board to review the chronology, to make an assessment, and to make any recommendations about what further action also might need to be taken. So I believe that's the appropriate thing to do.

Now, the third question is, what, if anything, does this mean about our relationship with China? I don't believe that we can afford to be under any illusions about our relationship with China, or any other country, for that matter, with whom we have both common interests and deep disagreements. I believe the course I have followed with China is the one that's best for America: disagreeing where we have serious disagreements; pursuing our common interests where I thought it was in the interest of the United States.

And again, let me say just one or two examples. I think if we hadn't been working with China, China would not have signed the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, the Chemical Weapons Convention. They would very likely not have refrained from transferring dangerous technology and weaponry to countries that we don't believe should get it. I doubt if they would have helped us as much as they have to try to contain the North Korean nuclear threat, or that we would have had the level of cooperation we had in trying to limit the Asian financial crisis, which is a serious economic and security problem for our country.

And I think we should just take the facts as they come and do what is best for the American people. But I can say categorically that it never crossed my mind that I should not disclose some inquiry being undertaken by the United States Government for reasons of commercial or other gain. That is not true. I just think we should always pursue what is in the interest of the United States. And if we think we've got a security problem, we ought to fix it. Plainly, the security was too lax for years and years and years at the labs. And a lot of important changes have been made, and yesterday the Secretary of Energy announced some others.

I think that if anybody did, in fact, commit espionage, it is a bad thing, and we should take appropriate action. But in our dealings with China, we should do quite simply what

is in the interest of the American people, and that's what I intend to do.

Yes. And Larry [Larry McQuillan, Reuters], you're next.

Q. Mr. President, if I could follow up on this issue of alleged Chinese spying, you just said that according to your latest briefing, you've not fully resolved the issue of whether Chinese actually spied on the United States. Are you meaning to suggest that you're not certain at this hour whether there was, in fact, Chinese spying?

You also said that you've had the full cooperation of the Energy Department. How do you explain, sir, then, that in April of 1997, the FBI made specific recommendations to the Department of Energy about the need to tighten security and those recommendations were not followed through on for 17 months?

And, finally, sir, you mentioned the spying in the 1980's, or the alleged spying in the 1980's. Can you assure the American people that under your watch, no valuable nuclear secrets were lost?

The President. Well, you asked several questions there. Let me say, first of all, it's my understanding that the Energy Department has fully cooperated with the FBI in investigating the alleged breach in the mideighties, including the person who was suspected. That is my understanding.

On the question of what recommendations were implemented by whom, when, that's what I've asked for the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board and Senator Rudman to review, to report to me on, as well as to make further recommendations.

I can tell you that I have—what I said about the espionage was that it is my understanding that the investigation has not yet determined for sure that espionage occurred. That does not mean that there was not a faulty security situation at the lab. The security procedures were too weak for years and years and years, for a very long time. And I believe that we are aggressively moving to correct that and a lot of changes have been made. I think Secretary Richardson has been quite vigorous in that regard.

The chronology about who did what, when, I think it's more important to have an independent analysis of that, which is why

I asked the Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board to do that.

Now, you asked me another question, which is can I tell you that there has been no espionage at the labs since I have been President. I can tell you that no one has reported to me that they suspect such a thing has occurred.

Larry.

Kosovo

Q. Mr. President, you met this morning with Members of Congress. And afterward, some of them came out and said that they had trouble imagining how you could justify airstrikes in Kosovo unless the Serbs launched a new offensive first. In fact, Senator Nickles actually suggested that it might take a significant massacre before such a move would get public support.

In your mind, does the mere fact that the Serbs refused to sign a peace treaty justify airstrikes? Or do you think they need to—if they took military action, only then you could act?

The President. Well, first, I believe they have already taken provocative actions. And there was, in the very recent past, the massacre at the village that I mentioned in my opening statement. Plus, there is the long unquestioned record of atrocity in Bosnia.

So what we have tried to do all along—and frankly, the Russians have been with us in this; I don't mean that they support military action, but they've been with us in the peace process—is we could see that the same thing that happened in Bosnia and that had happened to some extent in Kosovo already, and had already produced tens of thousands of refugees in Kosovo, was going to happen there. And it seems to me that if we know that, and if we have a NATO action order predicated on the implementation of the peace process, and the failure to do it triggering reaction, that we ought to do what we can to prevent further atrocities.

I understand what Senator Nickles was saying. I think he was saying that the American public has not seen the sort of atrocities there they saw in Bosnia, that that is not fresh in people's minds. But with all the troops that have been massed, and what we know about their plans and what they have publicly

said about them, I would hate to think that we'd have to see a lot of other little children die before we could do what seems to be, to me, clearly the right thing to do to prevent it.

Q. So you would act first then? I mean——

The President. I don't think it's accurate to say we're acting first. I think they have acted first. They have massed their troops. They have continued to take aggressive action. They have already leveled one village in the recent past and killed a lot of innocent people. I do not believe that we ought to have to have thousands more people slaughtered and buried in open soccer fields before we do something. I think that would be unfortunate if we had said we have to have a lot more victims before we can stop what we know is about to happen.

Wolf [Wolf Blitzer, Cable News Network].

Mrs. Clinton's Possible Senate Bid/ Personal Relationship

Q. Mr. President, there has been a lot of people in New York State who have spoken with your wife who seemed to be pretty much convinced she wants to run for the Senate seat next year. A, how do you feel about that; do you think she would be a good Senator? And as part of the broader question involving what has happened over the past year, how are the two of you doing in trying to strengthen your relationship, given everything you and she have been through over this past year?

The President. Well, on the second question, I think we're working hard. We love each other very much, and we're working at it.

On the first question, I don't have any doubt that she would be a magnificent Senator. She told me—oh, I don't know—over a year ago, and long before this ever occurred to anybody, long before we even knew Senator Moynihan wouldn't run for reelection—that she thought we should move to New York when I left the White House, knowing that I would spend a lot of time at home in my library and with the work there, but that we would also establish a home in New York. I don't have any doubt that she really would be a terrific Senator. She knows so

much about public policy; she cares so much about the issues, especially those that have a particular impact on New York, including the education and economic issues that would be very important to the people there.

But I also have to tell you, the people she's talking to must know more than I do because I literally don't have a clue. If you ask me today whether I thought it was more likely or not that she would run or not run, I could not give you an answer. I just don't know.

She's doing what I urged her to do, and what I think her instinct was, which is to talk to a lot of people. I think she was, at first, just immensely flattered that so many people wanted her to do it, but she couldn't really believe it. And I think now she's decided to take a look at it. But I don't have any idea what she's going to do. If she wants to do it, I will strongly support it. But I do not know and really have no idea what decision she will ultimately make.

Q. Mr. President——

The President Sarah [Sarah McClendon, McClendon News Service]. [*Laughter*]

Treatment of the President

Q. Sir, will you tell us why you think people have been so mean to you? Is it a conspiracy? Is it a plan? They treat you worse than they treated Abe Lincoln.

The President. I don't know. You know, one of my favorite jokes—you know that story about the guy that's walking along the Grand Canyon? And he falls off, and he's falling hundreds of feet to certain death, and he reaches out—he sees a little twig on the side of the canyon, and he grabs it. He takes a deep breath, and then all of a sudden he sees the roots of the twig start to come loose. And he looks up in the sky and he said, "Lord, why me? Why me? I pay my taxes. I go to work every day. Why me?" And this thunderous voice says, "Son, there's just something about you I don't like." [*Laughter*]

Who knows? Let me say this. Let me give you a serious answer. Whatever happens, I have been very blessed in my life. Most of us leave this life further ahead than we would be if all we got was justice. Most of us get a fair share of mercy, too. And I wouldn't

trade anything for having had the opportunity to be President and do the work I've done. So I feel very good about all that.

Sam [Sam Donaldson, ABC News].

Juanita Broaddrick

Q. Mr. President, when Juanita Broaddrick leveled her charges against you of rape, in a nationally televised interview, your attorney, David Kendall, issued a statement denying them. But shouldn't you speak directly on this matter and reassure the public? And if they are not true, can you tell us what your relationship with Ms. Broaddrick was, if any?

The President. Well, 5 weeks ago today—5 weeks ago today—I stood in the Rose Garden, after the Senate voted, and I told you that I thought I owed it to the American people to give them 100 percent of my time and to focus on their business and that I would leave it to others to decide whether they would follow that lead.

And that is why I have decided as soon as that vote was over that I would allow all future questions to be answered by my attorneys, and I think I made the right decision. I hope you can understand it. I think the American people do understand it and support it, and I think it was the right decision.

Scott [Scott Pelley, CBS News].

Q. Can you not simply deny it, sir?

The President. There's been a statement made by my attorney. He speaks for me, and I think he spoke quite clearly.

Go ahead, Scott.

Threshold for NATO Action in Kosovo

Q. Mr. President, it seems you're on the verge of committing U.S. forces to combat without a clear definition of your threshold for doing so. In January, Serb troops massacred 44 civilians. You called it murder and demanded that the Serb forces withdraw. They did not. Last month you said it would be a mistake to extend the deadline, but the deadline passed. Last week your administration said atrocities would be punished, and then after that a bomb went off in a Kosovo market and killed numerous children. What level of atrocities, sir, is a sufficient trigger? What is your threshold?

The President. Well, you've just made my case. I think that the threshold has been crossed. But when I said that the deadline should not be extended, Mr. Pelley, what I said was that those of us who were trying to shepherd the process should not extend the deadline. When the parties themselves asked for a delay, that's an entirely different kettle of fish. The rest of us can't be so patronizing that we can't say to both sides they had no right to ask for a delay. They asked, themselves, for a delay, and I thought it was the right thing to do. I still believe that it was the right thing to do. And it did lead to one side accepting the agreement.

You have made another point, which I did not make in my remarks, but I would like to make, based on the factual statements you made—everything you said was right, all the factual things you've cited—which is that there are, basically, two grounds on which, in my judgment, NATO could properly take action. One is the fact that we have already said that if the peace agreement were accepted by the Kosovars, but not by the Serbs, we would take action to try to minimize the ability of the Serbs just to overrun and slaughter the Kosovars. That's the first thing I said.

The second thing, what you said is quite right. While our threat of force last year did result in the drastic reduction of the tension and a lot of the refugees going home, it is absolutely true that there have been actions taken since then and forced movements since then that would trigger the other NATO action order to use force. The reason that has not been done, frankly, is because the peace process was going on and we knew that if we could just get an agreement from both sides that we could end the violence and we wouldn't have to act under either ground.

So from my point of view, as I made clear to the Congress today, I think the threshold for their conduct has already been crossed.

John [John Harris, Washington Post].

Q. Sir, if I might follow up. With the OSCE monitors leaving tonight, if Serbian forces move into Kosovo, will that trigger NATO strikes?

The President. I've already said, I do not believe that—I think that whatever threshold they need to cross has been crossed. I think

that, in view of the present state of things, it would be better if I did not say any more about any particular plans we might have.

John.

Books by Former White House Staff Members

Q. Sir, George Stephanopoulos has written a book that contains some tough and fairly personal criticism of you. Earlier, Dick Morris had written a somewhat similar book. How much pain do these judgments by former aides cause you? And do you consider it a betrayal for people to write books on the history of your administration while you're still in office?

The President. Well, like I said last night, I haven't read it. [Laughter] So I have absorbed no pain, since I haven't read either one of the books, but I—or even any articles about it. I don't think that furthers the commitment I made to the American people to focus on their business and their future.

What I will say is that I very much value the loyalty and service I have received from the overwhelming majority of the people who have worked here in the White House and in the Cabinet and in the administration, often under positions of almost unprecedented pressure. And I think that very often that kind of loyalty goes unrecognized, but it is not unappreciated by me.

I remember once, in the difficult days of early 1995, a scholar of the Presidency came here and said that I was a most fortunate person because I had enjoyed the most loyal Cabinet since Thomas Jefferson's second administration. It took my breath away when he said it, but the more I thought about it and the more I read about what had happened between this time and Mr. Jefferson's, the more I realized he was probably accurate. All I can tell you is I am profoundly grateful for the service and the loyalty that I have received, that our cause has received, and I think the American people have benefited quite richly from it.

Mr. Walsh [Ken Walsh, U.S. News & World Report].

Post Impeachment Impressions

Q. Mr. President, I understand that you don't want to speculate about what your op-

ponents might do now, after the impeachment struggle is over. But I wonder what your feelings are after some period of reflection on the impeachment process, how you were treated, and if you feel resentment, relief, and how you think people will deal with this and see it 10 or 20 years from now.

The President. I think it's best for me not to focus on that now. I think it's best for me to focus on my job. I have nearly 2 years to go. I have an enormous amount to do. I am trying to convince the Congress to adopt what, if they do adopt it, would be the most ambitious set of legislative proposals yet in my tenure, probably even more ambitious than the economic reforms of '93 or the balanced budget of '97 or any of the other things that were done—to save Social Security and Medicare for the 21st century, to pay our debt down, to secure our economy for the long run. And it seems to me that anything I say or do, or any time I spend working on that will detract from my ability to be an effective President. And I owe that to the American people, and so that's what I'm going to focus on.

Yes, go ahead.

Personal Savings Rate/National and International Economies

Q. Mr. President, with the Dow crossing the 10,000 mark, the stock market is trading well above any traditional benchmarks. Meanwhile, the personal savings rate has dropped below zero, largely in part, perhaps, because of rising stock prices. Are you worried that the U.S. and the world economies have become too dependent on a stock market that may be overvalued, and if so, is there anything the administration can do about it?

The President. I think what the administration should do is focus on the economic fundamentals at home and focus on fixing what appears to be, in my judgment, the biggest remaining obstacle to continued growth around the world on which our growth depends. I think that the savings rate, the aggregate savings rate of the country is very important for the long-term economic health of America.

I don't think there's any question that the savings rate dropping to zero or negative in the last quarter of last year is in part due

to the fact that people feel that they have more wealth. Now, that is not a bad thing that they have more wealth. One of the things that I'm really pleased about is that through retirement funds and other things, there is a more broad sharing of the wealth in America.

But I would like to just say the two things I think I should be working on, and this is something I ask all of you to watch as we debate the specific proposals on Social Security and the specific proposals on Medicare. Because, keep in mind, I carefully made the Social Security and Medicare proposals I made so that we could fund them and pay down the debt, because if we pay down the debt we increase savings, aggregate savings, in America. And when we do that, we assure the long-term stability of our economy. Lower interest rates means higher investment, more jobs, more businesses, lower mortgage rates, lower home loan rates—excuse me, lower car loan rates, lower college loan rates, lower credit card rates, the whole 9 yards.

I think that is very, very important. At a time when we have such a low personal savings rate it is very important that we get the Government debt down.

Secondly, it will help us to do what we have to do in the rest of the world. If you look at Asia, they have—their situation in a lot of those Asian countries is more like what we went through in the 1930's; that is, they have a collapse of demand. They need more liquidity. They need more funds. They need more investment. They need more activity.

If we are not taking money out of the international system, but instead paying down our own debt, then there will be more funds that will be able to flow into that part of the world to get the economy going—into Latin America to keep the economy there from sinking under the weight of the Asian problems. So this is very important.

The second thing I'd like to say is, I'm doing my dead-level best to build on the work we've been doing for the last 2 or 3 years to try to fix some of the problems in the international financial system. Keep in mind that one of the things that caused such great burden in the Asian financial crisis is, these countries didn't get in trouble the way

we were used to countries getting in trouble. We were used to countries getting in trouble where they had great big deficits and enormous inflation and everything got out of control.

What happened in these countries were, there were problems with the financial institutions, problems with the rules and the transparency and making loans and making investments. And we're trying to make some changes that we'll try to ratify this summer when we meet in Germany that I think could go a long way toward ensuring that this sort of thing will not happen again in the future.

Now, the markets will determine what happened to the markets. What I think I have to do is give the American people good, sound fundamentals, pay this debt down, and try to get the financial architecture of the 21st century straightened out.

Mark [Mark Knoller, CBS Radio].

Independent Counsel Statute

Q. Mr. President, your administration has come out against the extension of the independent counsel statute. And yet, when you signed a reauthorization of it 5 years ago, you called it “a force for Government integrity and public confidence.” Do you think now that you made a mistake when you signed that reauthorization 5 years ago? Do you disavow those comments? And if so, do you feel that way because you were the target of Ken Starr's investigation?

The President. Well, because of that, because I was the target, I think it is better for me to refer you to the conclusions reached by the American Bar Association that had the same change of heart, and by the Attorney General and the Deputy Attorney General. I believe that their views should be given more weight since they were not the subject of such investigations. And the bar association and the Attorney General and the Deputy Attorney General have spoken clearly and have said anything I could say.

Mara [Mara Liasson, National Public Radio].

Vice President Gore

Q. Mr. President, your Vice President has recently been ridiculed for claiming he invented the Internet and spent his boyhood

plowing steep hillsides in Tennessee. I'm wondering what you think of those claims and what advice you'd give him about how to brag on himself without getting in so much trouble. [Laughter]

The President. Well, you know, he came a lot closer to inventing the Internet than I did. [Laughter] I mean—I will say this about it. First of all, you remember he was talking about the information superhighway 20 years ago, and he did have a lot to do with supporting the development of it and supporting the Government research that led to these developments.

Keep in mind, I think when I became President in 1993, there were still only 50 or 60 sites on the Internet, and now there are millions and millions. So what I would like to say is, I don't know exactly what he said or exactly how it's been characterized, but he has been, for 20 years, one of the major architects of America's progress in technology, and he deserves a lot of appreciation for that. The Telecommunications Act, which I signed, he was heavily involved in the negotiations of our administration's positions. I talked to an executive the other day who said he was absolutely convinced at least 200,000 new high-tech jobs have already been created in America as a result of that act.

As far as his boyhood home, I think—I know what you're saying. You're saying, well, he went to St. Alban's and his daddy was a Senator. But it's also true that he is from east Tennessee, and he did learn to do all those things he did on the farm. I've been there, in Carthage, Tennessee. I've talked to his mother and his father, when he was alive, and other people who were there. And I think it's important that the American people know more about the Vice President's background. I think it's important that they know that he served in the Congress, that he served in the Senate, that before that he was a member of your profession, he was a journalist and served in the Armed Forces in Vietnam.

I think it's important also that they know that he was a principal architect of the major economic and other policies of this administration. And you know, you all will examine his claims and presumably the claims of ev-

erybody else who would like to succeed me, and make your judgments, and the American people will be as well. But the Vice President is, by nature, a reticent person, when it comes to talking about his life and his background. And I hope that he will find—for all of us, that's one of the most difficult things about running for public office. You want to be able to share formative experiences in your life or things you've been involved in that you're particularly proud of, and you want to do it without seeming to toot your own horn too much. And it's a challenge.

But I can tell you this. I'll be happy to toot his horn in terms of the years that we've worked together, because there's no question that he has been integral to all the good things that have happened in this administration.

Yes.

President's Legacy

Q. Mr. President, many young Americans learn the importance of telling the truth based on an allegory about our very first President; George Washington reportedly said, "I cannot tell a lie." What do you think your legacy will be about lying? And how important do you think it is to tell the truth, especially under oath?

The President. I think it's very important, and I think that what young people will learn from my experience is that even Presidents have to do that. And that there are consequences when you don't.

But I also think that there will be a box score, and there will be that one negative, and then there will be the hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of times when the record will show that I did not abuse my authority as President, that I was truthful with the American people; and scores and scores of allegations were made against me, and widely publicized without any regard to whether they were true or not; most of them have already been actually proved false. And it's very hard to disprove every false allegation against you.

But we have had more success, frankly, than I was afraid we would when we started. So I would hope that there would be a higher regard for truth telling by all people in public

life and all those who report on it. I think it would be a very good thing.

Yes.

Kosovo

Q. Mr. President, you said on Kosovo that if we don't act, the war will spread. That's very similar to what we said when we went into Bosnia several years ago. Our troops are still there. How can you assure the American people that we're not getting into a quagmire in Bosnia?

The President. Well, first of all, in Bosnia we have brought about 70 percent of our troops home. It has not been a quagmire. I told the American people we might well have some loss of life there, but I was convinced we would lose fewer lives and do more good over the long run if we intervened when we did.

I feel the same way about Kosovo. The argument that I tried to make for our putting troops there, if we could reach a peace agreement, was that we were moving in the right direction; the Europeans had been willing to shoulder a much bigger share of the responsibility; we were only going to be asked to put up about, oh, 15 percent of the troops.

But I don't want to get in the position in Kosovo that I was in in Bosnia, where the Pentagon came to me with a very honest estimate of when they thought we could finish. And we turned out to be wrong about that. We were not able to stabilize the situation as quickly as we thought we could. And this business in Kosovo is not helping any. Keep in mind, there could be some ramifications in Bosnia, as well as in Macedonia, where we have troops.

So I can just tell you that I think that we have tried to limit our involvement, we have tried to limit our mission, and we will conclude it as quickly as we can. I think that in all these cases, you have to ask yourself, what will be the cost and the duration of involvement and the consequences if we do not move. And I have asked myself that question as well.

Again, I would say to you, I would not be doing this if I did not think, number one, whenever we can stop a humanitarian disaster at an acceptable price, we ought to do it. Two, I'm convinced we'll be dragged into

this thing under worse circumstances, at greater cost if we don't act. And three, this is, to me, a critical part of the objective I brought to the Presidency of trying to leave office with an alliance between the United States and a more unified, more prosperous, more peaceful, more stable Europe. And this is one of the big three questions still hanging out there, as I said in my opening remarks, and I'm trying to resolve this.

April [April Ryan, American Urban Radio Network]. And then Mr. King [John King, Cable News Network].

Police Brutality/Race Initiative

Q. Mr. President, for many years, civil rights leaders have called for White House help in cases of police brutality and police profiling. Now, civil rights leaders say more needs to be done, like opening old brutality cases. Will you listen to those calls and expand your recent proposals allowing that, and when will you receive your completed draft of the race book?

The President. Let me answer the second question first because it's an easier question to dispose of. I have received and gone over a number of drafts of the race book, and I'm fairly pleased with where it's going. And one of the things we'll attempt to address is this whole issue of civil rights and law enforcement. And I would hope that it will be ready sometime in the next couple of months. I hope we'll have it finished, because we're rushing and we're trying to get it done.

Now, on the question of reopening old cases, I have to be candid with you and tell you that you're the first person who has ever mentioned that to me. I know that there must have been something in the letters about it. I will have to discuss that with our advisors and see what the appropriate thing to do is. But I would like to make a general statement about it, maybe to try to emphasize some of the points I attempted to make in my radio address on Saturday.

I've been involved in law enforcement for more than 20 years now, since I became attorney general of my State in 1977. Even before that, when I was in law school, and later when I was a law professor, I used to spend a lot of time teaching criminal law, criminal

procedure and constitutional law to law enforcement officers. I think that the police of this country know that I honor them and that I support them and that I think what they're doing is profoundly important.

I am very proud of the crime bill we passed in '94, not only because it was—along with the Brady bill—it banned assault weapons, but because it put 100,000 police on the street. And we're ahead of schedule and under budget on that goal. And my present budget called for putting 50,000 more out there in community policing in the highest crime areas of the country.

But I think that—and I am mindful of the fact that when you put on a gun, no matter how well trained you are, you have to be very careful about being under great stress and fear and making mistakes. But it seems to me that just as this administration has strongly supported law enforcement in every way to try to give us a safer country and a country where the law enforcement was closer connected to the community, we have a responsibility to deal with these issues of brutality when they arise and the whole question of policies of profiling, of presuming that people are more likely to be criminals because of their racial background or some other characteristic.

And I hope that our administration, working with civil rights groups, civil liberties groups, and law enforcement groups, will be able to really get a genuine debate on this and a resolution of it that is satisfactory, because we cannot have the kind of country we want if people are afraid of those folks who are trying to protect them.

Now, but in terms of opening the old cases, I just have to look at that. I don't know enough about the facts to give you an informed opinion.

Mr. King. And then Mr. Cannon [Carl Cannon, National Journal]. Go ahead.

Russia

Q. Mr. President, the Russian Prime Minister will be here next week seeking your support for another very large installment in international economic assistance. Yet, leading officials in your own administration say there has been a retreat, if not a reversal, in the pace of market reforms in Russia. Are

you prepared to support the new installment of IMF funding? And are you on the verge of an agreement with Russia regarding its nuclear transfers to Iran?

The President. Well, first, let me say that Mr. Primakov is coming here at an important time. And I have urged all of us in the administration, our economic team and our political team, to be acutely aware of the fact that the first thing he had to do was to try to stabilize his own situation when he took office.

In terms of the economic reforms that he needs to pursue, he needs some help from the Duma. And I would be a poor person to be unsympathetic with a man who is having trouble getting a certain proposal through a Congress. But I think it is important, if we are going to help Russia—and we should; we should do everything we can—that we do things that are actually likely to make a difference, instead of things that will undermine confidence over the long run in Russia and in the ability of others to invest there.

So I'm hoping we can reach an agreement which will permit the IMF program to go forward, because I think that is important. But it will only work if the money doesn't turn around and leave the country as soon as it's put in.

In other words, that's what—what we have to persuade the Russians of is that we're not trying to impose some economic theory on them. We're not trying to impose more—I don't mean just "we," the United States; I mean "we," the international financial institutions, of which the United States is a part—and that we want to see the back wages paid. We want to see the standard of living of the Russian people rise. We want to see more investment go in there.

But there have got to be some changes, some of which require legislative action in the Duma in order for this to work. Otherwise, even if we put the money in, it will leave. And so that's what we're working on. And I'm hopeful that we'll also get a resolution of the second issue you mentioned, and I'm optimistic about that.

Q. Mr. President——

Q. Mr. President——

[Laughter]

The President. I said Mr. Cannon could go next. I want to honor my commitment there. Oh yeah, yeah, I forgot Wendell [Wendell Goler, Fox News Channel]—go ahead. Wendell's next.

China

Q. We're jumping around a lot, and I apologize, but I'd like to return to China for just a minute. Officials with your administration have said that China's size, that it's so big, it's just difficult to ignore, that you can't just pretend they don't exist. But in terms of human rights, that merely underscores the magnitude of the problem. That's a billion people who don't have freedom of worship, freedom of the press, the right to peaceably assemble, the right to redress their government, the right to form their government. And you often talk about values when you talk about public policy. Does our relationship with China now reflect your values?

The President. I believe our policy toward China does. Our relationship is not perfect, but I think it is the correct course.

First of all, I believe that the principal problem, human rights problem in China is the absence of political rights and the civil rights associated with them. There are some examples of religious—denial of religious freedom. There's also a lot of religious expression there. You remember, I went to church in China, to a church that has regular services every week, whether we're there or not.

And there is the special problem of Tibet, which I engaged President Jiang about in our press conference and on which we continue to work.

So to me, it's very important, and we have to continue to press ahead on that. I think the question is, what is the best way for the United States to maximize the chances that China will become more open in terms of political and civil rights, that any vestiges of religious oppression will be dropped, that Tibet will have a chance as soon as possible to preserve its unique culture and identity? I think—and all these questions like that.

And it seems to me that the best way to do it is to work with the Chinese where it's in our interest to do so and to frankly and forthrightly state our differences where they

exist. If we were to reach a point where we were convinced that no agreement we made ever would be kept, where no progress could ever be made, then I would ask the American people to reassess that.

But I believe that the evidence is—and I cited some specific examples earlier in this press conference—the evidence is that the Chinese would like a constructive relationship with us. Keep in mind, the same sort of debate that's going on in this country, there is a mirror image of that debate going on in China today.

And there are people in China that are not at a press conference, but they're saying, "You know, the Americans cannot exist without an enemy; you know they've got to have an enemy; they've got to have somebody to dominate the world against; and what they really want to do is to contain us; they don't want us to flower economically; they don't want us to have influence, even if it's non-aggressive influence. And therefore, we need to build up our military. Therefore, we need to fight them at every turn. We need to oppose them at every turn."

These sorts of debates are going on in their country. And what I have said to President Jiang, to Premier Zhu, to everyone who is involved on the trip—and I look forward to the Premier's trip to the United States—is that we still have to define what kind of future we're going to have, how we're going to share it, what is the proper arena for competition, what is the proper arena for co-operation. And we have to judge China as we would judge anyone else and as we would expect to be judged by our actions.

What you have here is a relationship that is profoundly important, very large and inherently frustrating because it has many different elements, some of which we like, some of which we don't. And it requires a constant evaluation to see whether we're on the right track, whether we're doing the right things, whether we're going in the right direction. And because it doesn't fit within neat or calming categories, it can be a source of difficulty.

But I believe that I've done the right thing for America over the long run by trying to establish a positive but wide-open—I mean

eyes wide open—with no illusions relationship with China where we explicitly put our differences on the table; where we pursue them to a point of resolution if possible; where we don't give up on what we believe if we can't resolve them; and where we do work on the things that we have in common. I believe this is the right thing to do. But it is inherently frustrating at the points of difference.

Wendell, go ahead.

Press Secretary Joe Lockhart. This is the last question warning.

Chinese Nuclear Espionage

Q. Thank you, Joe. Mr. President, you said just a short while ago that no one has reported to you they suspect Chinese espionage at U.S. nuclear labs during your administration, sir. But sources tell Fox News, and we are reporting this evening, that China stole the technology for electromagnetic pulse weapons from several nuclear labs during your first term in office, sir, and that the Chinese have successfully tested these weapons in China. And the sources also say that the administration, at least, was aware of this.

Can you tell us, sir, were you not personally aware? Are you concerned about this? And what will be your administration's response to the report?

The President. Well, you didn't say what the source of what they sold was. You say they "stole," is that the word you used?

Q. Yes, sir, the technology for EMP weapons, from 4 of the 11 nuclear labs.

The President. To the best of my knowledge—and, you know, I try to—not only do I spend a great deal of time every day on national security measures, I try to prepare for these things. To the best of my knowledge, no one has said anything to me about any espionage which occurred by the Chinese against the labs during my Presidency.

I will—if you report that, then I'll do my best to find out what the facts are, and I'll tell you what they are. And if I have misstated this in any way because I don't remember something, then I will tell you that. But I don't believe that I have forgotten.

Yes, ma'am. One more.

Treasury Secretary/Federal Reserve Board Chairman

Q. Mr. President, can you put to rest rumors—you were talking earlier about the stability of your Cabinet. Can you put to rest rumors on Wall Street that Treasury Secretary Rubin is going to be leaving soon? Has he had any discussion about a departure with you? And in a related question, have you had any conversations with Fed Chairman Greenspan about his reappointment?

The President. The answer to the second question is, no, I have not. You should draw no conclusion about that one way or the other. It's just not come up. And I have not discussed Mr. Rubin's plans personally with him in quite a long while—maybe a year—I can't remember; it's been a good long while. He has served well. He has worked hard. I hope he will stay. Goodness knows, he's given his country a great deal, and he's served us very well. But I do not know what his specific plans are. I'm aware of all the rumors, but we've not had a conversation about it.

Yes ma'am, in the back. You had your hand up for a long time.

Bosnia

Q. Mr. President, I'm a Bosnian journalist, and my country before war was almost unknown, during the war, for a long time neglected. And now we feel a little bit forgotten, if you don't mind, sir. You're going to go to Slovenia soon, and you're talking about European security and stability as a priority of your foreign policy.

I'd like to know, and I believe that Bosnians would appreciate that, if you can say if you have any new initiative to boost a peace process in Bosnia. Bosnian dream of a united country is dying slowly—country is dying slowly. So if you're going to change some people, as New York Times reported, or the State Department hints, sir, what would be your next step in Bosnia, sir?

The President. The Bosnian peace process has been put under stress recently because the Brcko decision was made and had to be made within the time frame in which it was made. And I think the most important thing now is that we try to get beyond that and go on with the business of building the

common institutions and trying to get more economic opportunity there.

I'm very concerned that the politicians who still want to chip away at the idea of a united Bosnian nation will be able to do it principally because we're not able to show the benefits of peace to ordinary citizens. It seems to me that is the most important thing we can do once we stabilize the situation in the aftermath of the Brcko decision. And I think we're on the way to doing that.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President's 171st news conference began at 4:01 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro); convicted spy Aldrich Ames; former Senator Warren B. Rudman, Chairman, President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board; David E. Kendall, the President's personal attorney; Prime Minister Yevgeniy Primakov of Russia; and President Jiang Zemin and Premier Zhu Rongji of China. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

Proclamation 7174—National Poison Prevention Week, 1999

March 19, 1999

*By the President of the United States
of America*

A Proclamation

During National Poison Prevention Week, Americans focus on the progress we have made in reducing the number of accidental poisonings that occur each year and reaffirm our commitment to preventing further tragedies.

We can be heartened by the progress we have made. In 1962, when President Kennedy proclaimed the first National Poison Prevention Week, 450 young people died due to poisoning. That number has fallen dramatically. There are many who share the credit for this growing success story: responsible parents and caregivers, who keep medicines, cosmetics, household cleaners, insecticides, and other poisonous substances out of the reach of children; the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, which requires the use of child-resistant packaging on poten-

tially dangerous materials; the Poison Prevention Week Council, which annually distributes poison prevention information to pharmacies, public health departments, and safety organizations; and our Nation's poison control centers, which provide lifesaving emergency first aid information. Working together, these dedicated individuals and organizations have saved hundreds of lives each year.

But we cannot relax our efforts, because each life we lose to accidental poisoning is one too many. We must all do our part to protect our Nation's children by selecting and properly using child-resistant packaging, keeping poisonous substances accurately labeled and locked away from children, carefully reading and following all directions and caution labels on packages, and keeping the number of a poison control center close to the telephone. If a poisoning incident does occur, we need to respond quickly by contacting the poison control center, relaying the appropriate information—such as the age and weight of the poisoning victim and the type and amount of substance he or she has ingested—and heeding instructions. These simple safety measures can mean the difference between life and death.

To encourage the American people to learn more about the dangers of accidental poisonings and to take responsible preventive measures, the Congress, by joint resolution approved September 26, 1961 (75 Stat. 681), has authorized and requested the President to issue a proclamation designating the third week of March of each year as "National Poison Prevention Week."

Now, Therefore, I, William J. Clinton, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim the week beginning March 21, 1999, as National Poison Prevention Week. I call upon all Americans to observe this week by participating in appropriate ceremonies and activities and by learning how to protect our children from poisons.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this nineteenth day of March, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ninety-nine, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-third.

William J. Clinton